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Letter to Capitol Hill

CIA Director Casey defends his agency's controversial primer

After an 89-page CIA manual that instructed rebels in Nicaragua on terrorist tactics surfaced last month, the White House promised that any official involved in its development or approval would be dismissed. But in a letter to members of the House and Senate Intelligence committees that was made public last week, CIA Director William Casey insisted that the thrust of the manual had been misinterpreted, and he attempted to justify its overall purpose. "The emphasis is on education," Casey wrote, "not on turning a town into a battlefield."

The CIA manual violated the spirit of U.S. policy by advocating that the *contras* should "neutralize" local officials of the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Casey, however, explained that the passage, along with one that advocated "shooting" informers, should be consid-

A misunderstanding arose, he said, when the word remove was translated as "neutralize" in the Spanish version. Asked how a person is removed from office without violence, Reagan said, "You just say to the fellow that's sitting there in the office, 'You're not in the office any more.'"

Despite the disclaimers, the manual again raised questions about whether Washington's support for the *contras* was designed merely to put pressure on the

Nicaraguan government to stop its support of the Salvadoran rebels, as the Administration claims, or to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, as critics charge. According to Casey, the CIA-supplied documents state that the aim of the *contras* "is the development of a democratic and pluralistic government in Nicaragua." Countered Republican Senator Charles Mathias Jr. of Maryland: "The policy implied is the overthrow of an established government."

The Intelligence committees of the Senate and House have been waiting for the CIA inspector general's internal investigation of the manual, which was ordered by Reagan Oct. 18. The White House announced last week that the agency's inquiry had been completed and sent to the President's Intelligence Oversight Board for review, but officials would not say when it might be submitted to Congress.

California Democrat Norman Mineta, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, complained that the CIA would not allow his group to question the man believed to be the author of the manual, who was described by the Administration as a "low-level" operative on contract to the CIA. "We know who he is, and the CIA knows where he is," said Mineta, who maintains that the agent is still employed by the CIA.

Republican Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming, one of the few Senators to have studied the manual in detail, came to the CIA's defense. He explained that the document had been drafted as part of a larger effort to curb indiscriminate killings among some rebel factions. Indeed, parts of the manual dwell on improving the *contras'* relationship with Nicaraguan peasants, stressing peaceful persuasion over violence.

Contra leaders admit their guerrillas had been guilty of abuses and atrocities. Edgar Chamorro, a *contra* director now living in Key Biscayne, Fla., says one rebel field commander, known as El Suicidio, led his troops on a rampage in the spring of 1983, murdering peasants and raping women. Chamorro said last week that *contra* leaders arrested El Suicidio and some of his men last year and executed them after a court-martial.

Chamorro, however, denied that the main purpose of the manual was to help the *contras* discipline themselves. He claims that he was recruited in 1982 by CIA agents who promised a new regime in Managua "within a year." A Harvard graduate and onetime Jesuit priest, Chamorro was selected by the CIA to act as his rebel group's chief spokesman and was paid a \$2,000-a-month salary to help lobby Washington for support.

Chamorro, who is now at odds with other *contra* leaders still operating out of Honduras, complains bitterly that the CIA provided war-worn AK-47s and leaky wooden punts so ancient the *contras* nicknamed them the "Phoenician navy." Chamorro felt not only shortchanged but oppressively dominated by the American operatives. "Their insatiable appetite for control," he stated, "has almost brought this movement to the brink of disaster."

American operatives in the region were as susceptible to corruption as rebel officers, one *contra* leader told TIME last week. Some CIA agents were buying boots for the *contras* at \$13 a pair and invoicing them at \$26. When an Argentine officer involved in training the *contras* attempted to smuggle evidence of such markups out of Honduras, he was stopped at U.S. customs in Miami and the documents were removed from his baggage. More ominously, according to *contras* and State Department officials, two chief CIA operatives in Honduras were fired earlier this year after they were belatedly discovered to be Cuban agents. The counterspies, both Cuban Americans, had once worked for the CIA (one was in the team that



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ered in context. "It is important to note," his letter read, "that these passages are in the context of occupying a community and dealing with a situation in which actual or potential resistance remains."

President Reagan, campaigning Saturday at John Wayne's birthplace in Winterset, Iowa, took the Administration defense one step further. Said he: "I think you're going to find that it was all a great big scare and that there was nothing in that manual that had anything to do with assassinations or anything of that kind."

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Chamorro: "The brink of disaster"

tracked down Che Guevara in Bolivia). Two intelligence sources vehemently denied the charge and said that though there were changes in key operatives, the purpose was to install more experienced CIA employees.

Nevertheless, such revelations sharpened the dispute about Administration policy. Critics maintain that rifts over the *contras* have deepened within the intelligence community. "Some of the best people in the CIA stepped back and said it [the covert aid] is just not going to work," says a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Democrat Patrick Leahy of Vermont. Citing the agency's failure to halt the arms flow, reform the Sandinistas, or remove them from power, the Senator concluded: "You suddenly realize that we've got a multimillion-dollar covert action down there and every single objective is unattainable." —By Alessandra Stanley.
Reported by Martin Casey/Miami and Ross H. Munro/Washington